

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 7473

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, SOCI, BL

SUBJ: CHURCH SEEKS AMNESTY FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS

1. ON NOVEMBER 30, THE BOLIVIAN BISHOPS CONFERENCE DIRECTED A LETTER TO PRESIDENT BANZER REQUESTING A GENERAL POLITICAL AMNESTY DURING THE CHRISTMAS SEASON. TO MAKE THE LETTER OF THE BISHOPS CONFERENCE MORE SPECIFIC, THE COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE RELEASED A LIST OF 312 POLITICAL PRISONERS IN GOB CUSTODY AS OF DECEMBER 7. THIS LIST WAS COMPILED FROM COMPLAINTS FILED WITH THE COMMISSION BY RELATIVES OF THE PRISONERS.

2. MINISTER OF INTERIOR, WATER CASTRO AVENDANDO, MET WITH LA PAZ ARCHBISHOP MONSEÑOR JOGGE MANRIQUE AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE. IN A SUBSEQUENT PRESS CONFERENCE THE MINISTER ANNOUNCED THAT A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF POLITICAL PRISONERS WOULD BE RELEASED FOR CHRISTMAS. THE MINISTER STATED THAT THERE WERE IN TOTAL ONLY 151 POLITICAL PRISONERS IN CUSTODY. A NUMBER OF THESE WERE HARD CORE SUBVERSIVES AND TERRORISTS AND COULD NOT BE RELEASED. THE MINISTER AUTHORIZED REV. ALEJANDRO MESTRE TO VISIT PRISONS WHERE POLITICAL PRISONERS ARE HELD AND INSPECT CONDITIONS THERE.

3. SOURCES IN THE COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE INSIST THAT THERE ARE AT LEAST 300 POLITICAL PRISONERS. THE COMMISSION BELIEVES THAT THE MINISTER PLANS TO RELEASE 60 PRISONERS FOR
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CHRISTMAS AND HAS GIVEN THE FIGURE OF 161 AS A TOTAL OF PRISONERS

SO THAT IT WILL APPEAR THAT HE HAS RELEASED A LARGE PERCENTAGE OF THOSE HELD. THE COMISSION INFORMED AN EMBASSY OFFICER THAT THEY ARE SURE THAT PERSONS ARRESTED FOR POLITICAL CRIMES ARE HELD IN SPECIAL QUARTERS OF THE MINISTRR OF INTERIOR WHERE THEY ARE TORTURED UNTIL THE MINISTRY IS SURE THAT THEY HAVE YELDED ALL THE INFORMATION IN THEIR POSSESSION, AT WHICH POINT THEY ARE TURNED OVER TO THE PRISONS WHERE CONDIDTIONS ARE MORE HUMANE.

4. THE COMMISSION BELIEVES THAT EXCEPT FOR A FALLING OFF IN OUTRIGHT MURDER OF POLITICAL PRISONERS THE RHYTHM OF POLITICAL ARRESTS HAS REMAINED MORE OR LESS CONSTANT OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS AND IS LIKELY TO REMAIN SO. THE COMMISSION BELIEVES THAT MINISTER CASTRO'S ATTITUDE TOWARD HIS JOB IS NOT MARKEDLY DIFFERENT FROM THWT OF HIS PREDECESSORS.

5. COMMENT. THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION ON BEHALF OF POLITICAL PRISONERS ENJOYS A GOOD MEASURE OF SUPPORT IN MANY SECTORS OF BOLIVIAN SOCIETY, BUT MANY BOLIVIANS WOULD ALSO AGREE THAT THE HARD CORE OF TERRORISTS SHOULD BE RETAINED IN CUSTODY. WHILE THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT SOME POLITICAL PRISONERS ARE ABUSED IN QUESTIONING, THE EMBASSY DOES NOT HAVE INFORMATION TO SUPPORT THE COMMISSION'S IMPLICATION THAT THIS PRACTICE IS THE RULE.
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